Charge of test fee on Timber

†3263. SHRI P.K. MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken a decision to enhance the test fee charged on timber import by fifteen times;

(b) if so, reasons therefor;

(c) whether Government have received a demand from timber imports association for keeping the timber out of the definition of plant and also out of the purview of Plant, Flower and Seed Order, 1989 and to remove fee thereon; and

(d) if so, the action and decision taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI S.B.P.B.K. SATYANARAYANA RAO): (a) and (b) Enhancement of fee ordered *vide* Government of India Notification SO 467(E) dated the 16th May 2000 was subsequently moderated and harmonised *vide* Notification No. SO 574(E) dated the 14th June 2000.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) Hon'ble Supreme Court of India had passed an Order in response to SLP (CIVIL) No. 1227 of 1990 filed by M/s. Sarda Plywood Ltd. *Vs.* Union of India and others rejecting contention of the Petitioners to exclude timber logs from the definition of "plant". As such inclusion of timber in the expression "plant" as defined under the Plants, Fruits and Seeds (Regulation of Import into India) Order, 1989 was upheld by the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

Vacant Posts of CMD in SFCI

3264. SHRI AMAR SINGH:
SHRIMATI JAYA PRADA NAHATA:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the post of MD and Chairman of SFCI has been lying vacant and if so, the reasons therefor;

(b) whether most of the farms under SFCI are looked after by very junior officer instead of Director level officer as required under the rule and if so, the reasons therefor; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(c) whether Government have decided to privatise this Corporation and if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI S.B.P.B.K. SATYANARAYANA RAO): (a) Sir, the post of Managing Director and Part-time Chairman, State Farms Corporation of India (SFCI) fell vacant on 7.5.1999 and 15.7.1999 respectively. Pending filling up the two posts by the Public Enterprises Selection Board on regular basis, additional charge of the posts has been assigned to Officers of the Ministry of Agriculture. In the case of Managing Director, the selection process is complete and the offer of appointment has been issued to the selected candidate.

(b) SFCI farms are normally headed by Directors. Out of 12 farms, 6 farms are presently headed by Directors. The other farms were also hitherto looked after by Directors, but, subsequent to the posts falling vacant, charge has been given to the senior most officer of the concerned farm. Due to condition of financial stress in the Corporation, filling up of vacant post of Directors has been temporarily suspended.

(c) No. Sir.

Barren Land in the Country

†3265. SHRIMATI SAROJ DUBEY: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the total area of barren land in hectare in the country;

(b) whether Government are taking any effective steps to transform the sterile/barren land into cultivable;

(c) if so, details thereof; and

(d) if not the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI S.B.P.B.K. SATYANARAYANA RAO): (a) to (d) As per the report of the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, there is about 19.0 m.ha. which has been classified as barren land in the country. Barren land includes exposed steep mountain slopes, snow covered and such other areas etc., which can not be brought under cultivation at an economic cost. Hence, there is no programme in the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation to convert such barren land into cultivable land.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.